

VZCZCXYZ0001  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0171/01 0231527  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 231527Z JAN 10  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6250  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000171

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2020

TAGS: PGOV PTER I2

SUBJECT: DIWANIYAH ELECTION UPDATE: HUNT FOR TRIBAL SUPPORT HEATS UP, MIXED REACTIONS ON MUTLAQ

REF: A. BAGHDAD 32  
IB. BAGHDAD 136

Classified By: Diwaniyah PRT Team Leader Michael Klecheski. Reasons: 1 .4 (b/d)

I1. This is a PRT Diwaniyah cable.

I2. (C) SUMMARY: Although public campaigning in Diwaniyah Province for the March elections has yet to get underway, behind-the-scenes preparations are heating up. Most notably, parties seek to gain the support of key tribal leaders. Reactions to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) decision to exclude a number of candidates, ostensibly under the provisions of the Accountability and Justice Law, are mixed but generally not favorable. The PRT sees no signs that locals expect an outburst of violence in Diwaniyah. END SUMMARY

CAMPAIGN PREPARATIONS UNDERWAY

- - - - -  
I3. (C) Behind-the-scenes preparations for the elections campaign are underway, ahead of the official public campaigning. In Diwaniyah province, a total of 20 political entities and 253 candidates have registered with IHEC; some 600,000 registered voters will cast ballots for 11 seats in Iraq's next parliament. The mayor of Saniyah, a town near Diwaniyah city, told us his small party, for which he is a candidate, is gathering funds and beginning to produce campaign literature. He is quietly pressing his own candidacy, stressing the achievements he has made as mayor. He is also mobilizing his tribal connections to garner support. The mayor of Sudayr, another town near the provincial capital, described to us what he termed the effective efforts of the provincial branch of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) to play on the public's dissatisfaction with Diwaniyah's current Governor. (Ref. A and previous.) Nonetheless, he noted, PM Maliki remains popular in the province, and voters will be torn between voting for Da'wa because of Maliki or voting for ISCI to &punish8 the province's Da'wa-led administration.

EFFORTS TO WIN OVER TRIBAL LEADERS

- - - - -  
I4. (C) According to Sheikh Nabeel Sakban, one of the province's most prominent tribal leaders, parties are making strong, if covert, bids for tribal leaders, support. Sakban reported having been approached by ISCI and Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya for support, even though he is known to favor Da'wa. ISCI representatives suggested to him that they would do a better job than the incumbent government of compensating tribal leaders like him for losses due to agricultural woes. He told PRToffs that the ISCI activists also implicitly reminded him that they had made life difficult for him when ISCI controlled Diwaniyah's provincial government, subtly suggesting that they would do so again unless he supported them in the upcoming campaign. Sakban said he would continue to support Da'wa given his loyalty to the PM, but worried that ISCI might sway other tribal leaders through offers of money, jobs for members of their tribes, and other forms of government support. Sakban worried that Da'wa was not

preparing for its campaign as aggressively as ISCI in the province, and that Da'wa's candidates were too closely linked with the relatively unpopular provincial administration.

REACTIONS TO THE MUTLAQ DECISION: &IT,S JUST POLITICS8

¶5. (C) Although there is widespread contempt among local officials in Diwaniyah for Sunni MP Saleh al-Mutlaq, we have heard mixed reactions to IHEC's decision to exclude him and other candidates from the elections. (Ref. B). Sakban said the decision was unfortunate, since it threatened to disrupt the elections. A close PRT contact in the province's Health Department echoed that view, saying it could turn the elections into a farce. He suggested that unless the decision was reversed, Iraqis would have to wait for the next national elections to get the process right. Several advisors to the PC told us that much of the population in this predominantly Shi'a province, though in no way sympathetic to Ba'athists, viewed the decision skeptically, seeing it as politically motivated. Some interlocutors, including the Sudayr mayor, took a different approach, welcoming the removal of the traitor Mutlaq.<sup>8</sup> The mayor conceded that it could disrupt the elections but felt it was an appropriate decision. Similarly, a journalist with the Ittihad newspaper described Mutlaq as acting as a member of the political process but as a rival for the whole system,<sup>8</sup> who should be excluded from the election.

¶6. (SBU) According to PRT media contacts, some one hundred people attempted to hold a demonstration on January 16 against Ba'athist participation in the elections, but the Governor refused them permission to demonstrate. A contact in the Provincial Council Chairman's office corroborated the account. He also told the PRT he does not expect further

attempts to demonstrate in Diwaniyah about the issue. Despite his refusal to let the demonstration proceed, the Governor has taken a tough line against the Ba'athists, including in a January 18 conference in Diwaniyah in which he described Ba'athist efforts to foil the political process, and the incumbent government's steps to counter those efforts.

¶7. (C) The January 14 bombings in Najaf raised concerns in Diwaniyah, reportedly leading to a tightening of police checkpoints to prevent a similar occurrence in this province.

One well connected journalist told us that the most common explanation is that the bombings were a response to the IHEC decision. According to PRT media contacts, some locals believe, however, that the incident was connected to recent Saudi religious authorities' statements against Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Diwaniyah has seen little political violence and, though locals believe there could be an uptick in violence as the campaign heats up, they do not expect a huge flare-up in the period ahead. The PRT's sense is that the January 14 bombings in neighboring Najaf have not significantly altered the thinking of Diwaniyah's population on that score.

HILL